

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

Dr. Ronnie G. Elmore Takes Diversity to Another Level at Kansas State University

By Dr. Donald F. Smith and Dr. Howard Erickson
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When Kansas State University's Dr. Ronnie Elmore was presented with the Iverson Bell Recognition Award at the March 2013 meeting of the AAVMC,¹ he reflected on the ideals of his parents as he was growing up in southern Illinois in the 1950s.

*"Despite growing up in a mostly white neighborhood, I remember my parents treating young Black friends to restaurant meals periodically. My Dad would call ahead to make sure it was okay to take them with us so that he didn't embarrass the children if they got there and Blacks were not allowed. Similarly, my mother would sometimes bring an armful of dresses home from the store and invite young Black girls over to try them on before she bought the clothes for them. The girls wouldn't have been allowed to try on clothes in the store, so my mother figured out this way to get around the limitations imposed by the storekeepers."*²

Some years later, as a faculty member and Head of Large Animal Medicine and Surgery at Kansas State University, Dr. Elmore had two Nigerian students in his laboratory. When a theriogenology resident from a neighboring state informed Dr. Elmore that he refused to go on a farm call unless the two Black students stayed behind, Ronnie simply said, "Well, then I guess you're not going with me," and off he drove with the African students.

In his nomination letter for the Iverson Bell award, Dean Ralph Richardson wrote,

*"There has never been a time in the history of this college when the number of historically underrepresented students is as large as what we are currently experiencing. This is due almost exclusively to Dr. Elmore's faithful and extensive travel to historically black college and universities."*³

Elmore feels strongly that the best way to promote diversity is to put "shoe leather on the ground." He travels extensively to colleges and universities that enroll a large number of minority students, such as Oakwood College in Huntsville, Alabama; Texas A&M University, El Paso; University of Texas, Arlington; and Prairie View A&M University, Texas. He also hosts minority students and their parents at Kansas State.



Dr. Kimathi Choma (L) and Dr. Elmore in front of a composite of the Class of 1912 that includes a picture of Dr. John William Brown, the first African American DVM graduate at Kansas State University.
(© Kansas State University College of Veterinary Medicine)

Since 2006, Elmore has participated in the Minorities in Agriculture Natural Resources and Related Sciences Conference (often as a presenter), as well as the Michael Tilford Conference on Diversity and Multiculturalism, to explore strategies and exchange ideas about practical applications of diversity education and establish collaborative efforts.

Dr. Elmore also teaches an elective course called “Practicing Veterinary Medicine in a Multicultural Society,” in which he emphasizes not just racial and ethnic diversity, but also differences in geography, gender, sexual orientation and generational issues. One of the readings he recommends is Maura Cullen’s book, “35 Dumb Things Well-Intended People Say: Surprising Things We Say That Widen the Diversity Gap.”

In 2007, Dr. Elmore successfully negotiated with Kansas-based Hills Pet Nutrition, securing \$100,000 annually and nearly \$600,000 to date, to support scholarships for minority students, primarily African American students. The funds also provided summer research and externship experiences so the students can become familiar with careers in veterinary medicine.

Dr. Elmore is quick to applaud the support of his university and college administrations in promoting diversity. Indeed, as was mentioned in an earlier story we co-authored, Kansas State Agricultural College (now Kansas State University) had an equal number of men and women (26 each) when it opened in 1863. It was also the first agricultural college and only the second fully co-educational public college anywhere in the United States.

Not only did the college welcome African American students from its beginning,⁴ but a Chinese man (Ching Sheng Lo) graduated in 1923, making him the first student from China to earn a DVM in the United States.⁵ Dr. Sheng eventually became Provost of the College of Agriculture at China Central University.

From 1962 to 1977, Kansas State University faculty helped establish a College (Faculty) of Veterinary Medicine at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.⁶ Daniel Saror earned his DVM degree from KSU in 1970 and returned to Nigeria to become the Vice-Chancellor of Ahmadu Bello University.

Dr. Elmore has traveled to China during the past two years to interview students who have applied to study veterinary medicine in US veterinary schools. This is part of the US-China Center for Animal Health, a KSU-based training center for the improvement of Chinese animal health education, research, government interaction and industrial workforce and a center that will assist Chinese and US animal health companies to access the US and Chinese markets, respectively. In the entering class this fall, the Class of 2017, there will be three students from China, one from Viet Nam, and one from New Zealand.

Ronnie Elmore likes to quote Robert Louis Stevenson's story of watching the lamplighters "punching holes in the darkness" to light the streets at night. "That's all I'm trying to do," Ronnie told me recently; "I am just hoping to punch some holes in the darkness of lack of diversity, understanding and acceptance."⁷

¹ Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges award in the Iverson Bell recognition for promoting diversity in veterinary medicine.

² Ronnie Elmore, DVM, (Associate Dean for Academic Programs, Admissions and Diversity, KSU). Telephone conversation with Donald F. Smith (Cornell University), 2013 Jun 23.

³ Ralph Richardson (Dean, Kansas State College of Veterinary Medicine) letter to AAVMC, 2012 Oct 16.

⁴ African-American Veterinary Students at Kansas State University (1910-1950). By Dr. Donald F. Smith and Dr. Howard Erickson. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. June 2, 2013.

⁵ Elmore, Ronnie G and Howard H. Erickson. *A Century of Excellence: Kansas State University College of Veterinary Medicine*. The Donning Company Published, Virginia Beach, VA, 2005.

⁶ *Ibid*.

⁷ Elmore, see endnote 2, above.

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TOPIC:

African American Veterinarians

ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

Dr. Donald F. Smith, Dean Emeritus of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, had a passion for the value of the history of veterinary medicine as a gateway for understanding the present and the future of the profession.

Throughout his many professional roles from professor of surgery, to Department Chair of Clinical Sciences, Associate Dean of Education and of Academic Programs and Dean, he spearheaded changes in curriculum, clinical services, diagnostic services and more. He was a diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and a member of the National Academy of Practices. Most recently he played a major role in increasing the role of women in veterinary leadership.

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine is one of his projects where he was able to share his vast knowledge of the profession.

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